

As Good as Gold: A play
in One Act: by Laurence
Housman

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1916
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28-30 West Thirty-eighth Street : New York

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AS GOOD AS GOLD.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
BROTHER JUNIPER
A GOAT-BOY
FIRST ROBBER
SECOND ROBBER
THIRD ROBBER
AN OLD MISER

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AS GOOD AS GOLD

SCENE:—*The scene opens on the side of a hill, in a space of cross-roads, surrounded by trees. It is deep dusk, almost dark, but light is beginning. One bird pipes, then another; as daylight increases, other birds join in, till the air is loud with them. Presently against the trees by the roadside one sees the figure of ST. FRANCIS, hooded, with hands folded in his sleeves, and his head raised in ecstasy.*

FRANCIS. Welcome, Sister Dawn! (*The sun rises*) Welcome, Brother Sun!

(*Up the hill comes BROTHER JUNIPER, grunting and out of breath, carrying a large basket of bread upon his back.*)

JUNIPER. Oh, Lord, my poor back!—Oh, Lord, what big brother bellies to feed we all do have, to be sure! Oh, Lord, what a—(*He sees ST. FRANCIS, and pulls up with a jerk. From the monastery above comes the sound of the first Angelus. JUNIPER sets down his load, crosses himself and kneels*) Ave Maria, gratiae plena, Dominus tecum. Father Francis—Father Francis—that was the Angelus!—What? and didn't you hear?—Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus. I'm saying it for both of us, Father—Sancta Maria, mater dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostris. The Lord love you, Father, have you had a stroke? Or is it Lot's wife you're

thinking yourself to be? Or is it our blessed Lord, and Our Lady, and all the rest of 'em ye're seeing up there so plain?—Father Francis, speak to me, for the love of God! Oh, Lord, the holy horrors, he's got 'em again. Here's bread, Father Francis, fresh from the oven, just baked: fresh and warm, like our Lord himself when He rose the third day!—Bread for our poor sinful bodies, Father; for it stands to reason we must feed them, sometimes, when the Devil's not looking, doesn't it, Father?—There he stands and knows all about it, and won't say anything! What if I was to have 'em too? Oh, Lord, don't let them catch me this time—not yet!

(A GOAT-BOY has come on the scene, and stands looking on, rather dazed and puzzled. At sight of him, BROTHER JUNIPER'S tone changes.)

Well? Who are you? What are you doing there, with those eyes? Eh?

BOY. Holy Father! What's yon man a-doing? What for's he standing and staring like that?

JUNIPER. He's having a vision: that's all. What business is it of yours?

BOY. What's he having a vision for?

JUNIPER. Can't help himself. It's the way the spirit takes him; that—and hunger, and no sleep. I've had 'em myself sometimes. Here, whipper-snapper, be off!

BOY. What's it about? What's he seeing now? Oh, Father, look at his eyes!

JUNIPER. He's seeing Heaven, of course—Heaven: place where you and I shan't be, not for thousands of years; and better not be too sure even then. You've to have all the flesh burnt off your bones, my son—all your evil lusts and passions pinched out of ye by Devils, before you'll ever be where he is now, praise be to God!—

BOY. What for's all that gold lying at his feet, Father?

JUNIPER. Gold! What are you talking about, boy? Gold? (*He goes and looks*) Oh, Lord, keep safe my sinful eyes! Why, what's this? Shut your eyes, boy, shut your eyes! This isn't for you to see!—Father, Father Francis, did you know that you've got gold here, under your feet?—Father, did you know?—Oh, Father, it's not reasonable of ye not to answer a question like that? Holy Mary, there's enough gold here to make a man miserable for life, and still ye don't answer how ye've come by it! Did the Devil send it to tempt you, Father? Or was it our Lady wanting you to build her a fine new Church?

BOY. He's coming to his senses, Father! I saw one of his eyes give a wink.

JUNIPER. Take care, then, to be gone first, else I shouldn't wonder but he may eat you!—

BOY. Oh!—

(*ST. FRANCIS begins to draw his hands out of his sleeves. The BOY turns and runs.*)

JUNIPER. Aye, that's right! He's off! (*He begins to gather up the gold*) Father, what will I do with it? Will I dig a hole in the ground and bury it till the day of joyful resurrection?— Or will I put it into the basket along with the bread?— Or will I give it to the birds?— Or—here's the bag that it came in—shall I put it into that? (*ST. FRANCIS bends his head and, looking down, sees the basket of bread*) Yes, Father, it's me that's talking to you—Brother Juniper. I've been down to the bake-house to fetch bread.

FRANCIS. This was the Bread of Life which came down from Heaven! Welcome, Brother Bread!

JUNIPER. No, Father, this came up from the bake-house, I'm telling you.

FRANCIS. You there, Brother Juniper?— Give me a mouthful of Brother Bread.

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, why do you always make us feel it's like murder to eat anything? And there, look how he has burnt himself! (*Laughs to himself, and cuts bread*) Have a big piece, Father! (*FRANCIS breaks off a small piece, and gives JUNIPER the rest*) And Father, where did you get all that gold?

FRANCIS. Brother Juniper, hark to that bird!

JUNIPER. Yes, Father, he's a wonderful bird—for his size. I've noticed him, too: got a voice like a cricket. Dear Father, where did all that gold come from?— There now, and you're sitting on it!

FRANCIS. Ah, yes—yes, I remember. It was here.

JUNIPER. Yes, Father, I thought, maybe, you'd remember it was here.

FRANCIS. Last night I stood under that tree—Sister Owl sat upon a branch. Her voice was soft, praising God.

JUNIPER. Aye, Father. Did you see her catch a mouse?

FRANCIS. And as she sat, three white feathers fell out of her breast.

JUNIPER. Holy Trinity, you don't say! Oh, here is the story I'm going to like!

FRANCIS. Then she went, and Sister Night was left alone.

JUNIPER. Yes, but the gold—what about the gold, Father?

FRANCIS. The gold? That is what I'm telling you, my son. About midnight the moon set, and there came rain. And under the darkness the leaves dripped, and the earth drank, and a sweet savour came up from the ground—and all the world was asleep.

JUNIPER. And did the gold walk in its sleep, Father?

FRANCIS. Sister sleep is gentle, but she is strong. Her wings are silent as the white owl's, but her voice more soft.

JUNIPER. But look, Father—the gold!

(He holds up a coin, which ST. FRANCIS takes.)

FRANCIS. Now, mark, Brother, how poverty afflicts poor men! Night shed benediction from on high, slumber filled all the air. Back into the sky had come the stars. Overhead went the soft drip of leaves——

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, what have the stars and leaves got to do with it?

FRANCIS. Then came three mortal men. Here at my feet they sat down, and in the darkness began to count their gold. First one way, then another, they counted it, and never would it come right. So, snatching it from hand to hand, they fell to strife and their voices grew loud. No longer could I hear the soft breath of night, nor the dripping of the leaves, though the drops still fell on my face.

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, were you not afraid? Had they found you, they would have killed you.

FRANCIS. ' And as they wasted themselves in wrath, my heart was moved to pity them; and I said——

JUNIPER. Said? Oh, Lord! were you mad, Father? What was it possessed you to say anything?

FRANCIS. I said, " Not so loud, Brothers, not so loud! Sister Night is asleep."

JUNIPER. Lord help us, Father, you said that? What then?

FRANCIS. Ere I had done speaking, they were gone; and Sister Night had her rest.

JUNIPER. Oh! but, Father, suppose they were to come back for it?

FRANCIS. Perhaps they will, Brother; for men are often foolish, not knowing when they have become rich.

JUNIPER. Gold is a great catch, Father. One time I, too, did like to look on it.

FRANCIS. You did well, Brother, for God gave her a goodly countenance. See how with her face she loves the sun! (*He holds a gold-piece to the light*) Gold is beautiful, Juniper; and when God made gold he loved her and saw that she was good. Then came man and spoiled her of her beauty. We must be sorry for Sister Gold, Brother, and pity when we see her in the dust.

JUNIPER. Oh, look! Father, look! There under the wood are three men, with eyes, watching us! They are coming back, Father, they are coming back! Oh, Father Francis, Father Francis, don't let them kill me! Oh, hide me, hide me safe, somewhere! (*ST. FRANCIS continues to eat his bread, while JUNIPER hides behind the bread-basket*)



(*Enter the THREE ROBBERS*)

1ST ROBBER. Morning, your Reverence!

FRANCIS. God bless you, Brother.

2ND ROBBER. Good-morning, your worship!

FRANCIS. God be with you, fair friend.

3RD ROBBER. Master, you must go hence; for this pitch is ours.

FRANCIS. Give me leave, friend, to stay awhile. For here I am guarding the poverty of three honest men, whose faces I do not know.

1ST ROBBER. Sir, say you so? Why, 'tis poverty that brings us here now.

3RD ROBBER. I would have you know, Master, there was gold here which was ours. (*After looking round for awhile, threateningly*)

2ND ROBBER. And we be now come seeking it.

FRANCIS. Alas, Brothers, have you come back to be made poor?

1ST ROBBER With that gold we shall be rich.

FRANCIS. Last night ye were not so. For then, brothers, ye lost peace, and friendship, and understanding. Also did ye not lose heart?

3RD ROBBER. How so, Master?

FRANCIS. Yea, for ye lost courage, and ran like sheep, and had no friend left you but fear! See, then, brothers, to what poverty gold brought you!

2ND ROBBER. Sir, we ran because it was dark night, and because an angel spoke. But we have not to fear angels by day.

FRANCIS. Alas, friend, then how much more poverty is now yours! For if ye fear not angels, ye fear not God! And if ye fear not God, then ye must needs fear the Devil, which is the foulest fear any man can have!

3RD ROBBER. I fear neither Devil nor man!

FRANCIS. Brother, neither do I!— But very greatly do I fear God.

1ST ROBBER. I doubt not, sir, we shall all fear God when we come to die.

FRANCIS. As when you come to a ditch, fearing that you cannot leap it. Think you, friend, that you could leap over that tree?

1ST ROBBER. No, sir.

FRANCIS. God is much taller than that tree, brother. With His little finger he covereth the whole world, and touching, He maketh the smallest thing to seem great. Lo, last night, you heard only a poor worm speak, and thought it was an angel, and ran away!

3RD ROBBER. A worm, sir?

FRANCIS. I was that worm.

3RD ROBBER. Then I'd have you tell us, what have you done with our gold?

FRANCIS. I am sitting on it. The worm has but to turn. (*He gets up*) Friend, there is your gold!

Oh, come, brothers, and look on Poverty; for this is she!

2ND ROBBER. What does he mean—Poverty?
(*Aside*)

1ST ROBBER. Has he put a curse on it, think you?

3RD ROBBER. If he has, he shall take it off again!
But when I get my hands full of gold, I snap fingers at poverty.

FRANCIS. Even as one that beats his own wife, both having and despising her.

3RD ROBBER. Here! Give over, I say!

FRANCIS. Well, Brothers, since the Devil hath robbed you of all wealth, make good use of the poverty that he hath left. Fare you well, Brothers.

(1ST and 2ND ROBBERS watching ST. FRANCIS about to depart, make signs to one another.)

2ND ROBBER. Stay, Master!

FRANCIS. Well, friend?—What is your will?

2ND ROBBER. Look you, Master: there be the gold, and here be we three men, and I the littlest of them. Leave it to them—what chance of my share have I?

1ST ROBBER. You'll get your share, don't fear.

3RD ROBBER. As much as you are worth, and no more!

3RD ROBBER. No, I won't! And wasn't getting it last night, either!

3RD ROBBER. Ye parrot-hatch, hold your tongue!

2ND ROBBER. Share and share alike, it was to be!

3RD ROBBER. And *will* be!

2ND ROBBER. Then you stop and see it done, Master! Stop and see it done!—Yes, he may be a fool, but he's honest. So I say, let him judge, and give each man his portion. Fair, that's what I say, fair!

3RD ROBBER. You'll be fair dead, when I've done with you!

1ST ROBBER. (*Nudging* 3RD ROBBER) It's all right; let him do it! There, sit down, Father. You divide it for us.

JUNIPER. Don't touch it. Father, don't touch it. It's come of evil!

FRANCIS. Sit down, Brothers. Juniper, bring me the gold.

JUNIPER. Father, I think I'll get the yellow fever. Praise be to God! (JUNIPER, *piling it on the bag that it came from, brings the gold to* ST. FRANCIS)

FRANCIS. Are you not hungry, brothers?

ROBBERS. Hungry? We are hungry as ogres, Master, *we* are!

FRANCIS. Bring hither the basket—Come forth, Brother Bread!—Look, is he not fair? Brother Bread, see you these three hungry men? They wish to be at one with you. Shall it be?—And lo, after his manner, Brother Bread speaketh, and like our Blessed Lord, he divideth himself among all, giving alike to each. (*He distributes the bread*) Let us thank God, brothers, that he hath sent bread into the world, to die that we may live.

(1ST and 2ND ROBBERS *make the sign of the cross*)

JUNIPER. (*To* 3RD ROBBER) Cannot you cross yourself?

3RD ROBBER. Who the Devil are you?

JUNIPER. Ah! (JUNIPER *gets behind bread-basket, and with that behind* ST. FRANCIS *also*)

FRANCIS. Now for this bread, brothers, if you had it not, and so were near to death, would you not give all the gold in the world?

1ST ROBBER. Aye, that we would, Master!

FRANCIS. See, then, how much more precious to you is bread than gold—For no man can die for lack of gold. (*He spreads out the money*) How came you, brothers, by all this Poverty? Was it some man that did rob you?

3RD ROBBER. *Rob us? Rob us?* No, we weren't robbed, Master.

1ST ROBBER. Nor, to speak truly, did we rob any man.

3RD ROBBER. No.

2ND ROBBER. This gold, Master, we found.

1ST ROBBER. Aye, buried in the earth by one that had no use for it.

3RD ROBBER. Therefore was it not ours?

FRANCIS. If Sister Earth gave it to you.

3RD ROBBER. Ah, He didn't have any say!

2ND ROBBER. Other did, though.

FRANCIS. What other?

2ND ROBBER. Why, He that first put it there! Ah! when he came back there was trouble then!

1ST ROBBER. He was an old miser, Father. Gold was no good to him, he never spent any.

2ND ROBBER. And for him to keep putting it in the ground, why, that was a sin against common-sense, that was.

3RD ROBBER. Well, Master, let us get on to business.

1ST ROBBER. Ah, that's right: divide!

2ND ROBBER. Share and share alike!

FRANCIS. I will divide it, then, into four portions.

ROBBERS. Four!

3RD ROBBER. Oh, he wants a share for himself, does he?

1ST ROBBER. He means we're to pay for the bread!

FRANCIS. No: Brother Bread gave himself; he does not seek payment.

3RD ROBBER. Then, why four?

FRANCIS. Will you not give her share to Sister Earth? (*They all stare non-plussed*) You thought the old man foolish; but he was wise. It is right to bury the dead.

1ST ROBBER. He isn't *dead*, Master.

3RD ROBBER. I gave him but a knock or two, to make him lie quiet. And look you, Master, *he* talks of share and share. (*Pointing to 2ND ROBBER*) But I say, how much was he worth? If one digs while another only looks on, how then? And if one does **all** the fighting and another only looks on, how then? Is he to have the same share as me?—Not likely!

2ND ROBBER. Hadn't someone to watch while you dug? Hadn't someone to stop a man's mouth when he cried 'Murder!'—Did you get your blamed finger bitten like me? No fear!

(The two ROBBERS face each other with threatening gestures)

FRANCIS. Oh, Brothers, why have you let all this poverty come on you? See, now, how you two have lost friendship that were friends before! Ye have shared bread and are satisfied; but in no sharing of this gold will ye be satisfied, for never can ye have so much of it, but ye will want more. Oh, brothers, let us have pity on Sister Gold!

1ST ROBBER. How take pity, Master?

FRANCIS. To remedy the sad plight wherein now she finds herself.

3RD ROBBER. Good Lord, here's a lunatic for you! Why, what's wrong with her!

FRANCIS. Is she not naked, and cold, and in captivity?

2ND ROBBER. In captivity, Master?

FRANCIS. Surely, even as a fish, when you take it from the water which is its home! Sister Gold loves to be underground. She likes quiet, and darkness, and rest, with a good weight of earth over her for a covering. And of all that, man has deprived her. He has divided her from her friends, he has made a round thing of her, to toss, and to spin, and to dance; and to go junketing with him from place to

place, and to buy things that she has no use for, and to be thrown away in lewd living, and to be fought for, and to have men's blood spilled over her fair body. Are you not sorry for Sister Gold?

2ND ROBBER. Master, you do make I to weep! Never did I know what a melancholy creature gold was till now.

FRANCIS. Weep no more, Friend, since now you can make her happy again.

1ST ROBBER. How can the likes of we make her happy, Master?

FRANCIS. First you can cover her nakedness.

2ND ROBBER. Ah? Can we, though? How?

FRANCIS. Put her back into Mother Pouch.

3RD ROBBER. Mother Pouch? Who's she?

FRANCIS. (*As he displays it*) I do not know any other name for her; but she has a large mouth, and long ears, and she is patient.

3RD ROBBER. (*Laughing*) Father, you be the biggest Tom Fool I ever met! Don't he make a chap laugh? I haven't laughed like that since my old mother died.

FRANCIS. You did well to be joyful then, friend—Your mother went to God, did she not?

3RD ROBBER. So I trust, Father!

FRANCIS. But for that journey she took no gold with her?

3RD ROBBER. Nay, Master, she did not.

1ST ROBBER. He got the old girl's stocking right enough, Master.

FRANCIS. Yet she, without gold, made a better journey than you with gold, and came at last to a better inn.

3RD ROBBER. Maybe she did, Master.

FRANCIS. And for that end you buried her?

2ND ROBBER. Aye.

FRANCIS. So now, if you bring Sister Gold, she likewise will find her way to God, doubt not.

3RD ROBBER. You think, Master?

FRANCIS. For the City of God is made of pure gold very precious, and it is still abuilding. And the gold which you give back to Him on earth shall be to the making of those bright walls; and hereafter shall be part of that gateway by which you go in.

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, if ye talk like that, I'll be getting a vision, Father! Poor sinner that I am!

FRANCIS. Then, when you see her, you will say, "Hello, Sister Gold! How did you come here?" And she will answer: "Brother Robber, it was *you* that sent me hither."

3RD ROBBER. Robber, you say? Oh, but you can't prove it on me! You can't prove it!

FRANCIS. No, friend: neither can Sister Gold. So then you will say to her: "Sister Gold, *whom* have I robbed?" And if you have robbed no man she will be dumb. So you will say further: "There was a poor old miser burying gold in a lonely field; and all his spirit was bowed and broken with the care of it. And even as he dug he did sweat, and started and trembled, looking to right and to left and behind him, so much was he afraid."

1ST ROBBER. Father! How did you know that?

FRANCIS. Sister Gold has told me, also Mother Pouch. At night when he slept, Mother Pouch lay under his head, and he had gray hair. (St. FRANCIS *begins to put the gold back into the pouch*)

3RD ROBBER. Oh, my God! you do frighten me!

FRANCIS. And so to rid him of his fear: first you

FRANCIS. And so to rid him of his fear, first you Sister Gold.

ROBBERS. (*Sharing the confession between them*) Yes, Father! That's true, Father! We didn't find it, we took it, Father! Oh, what a holy terror he be for discovering of our sins!

JUNIPER. Aye!

FRANCIS. And so you left him thinking of noth-

ing but his head, which was far more precious to him than gold.

3RD. ROBBER. *Father!* Shall I be hanged for it?

FRANCIS. No, friend. But having wrought in him a good work, you should not seek to be paid for it.

3RD ROBBER. I don't, Father, I don't! I only ask to be let off, for this one time, Father!

(THE ROBBERS *all kneel at the feet of* ST. FRANCIS.
He rises.)

FRANCIS. Oh, Brothers, look at the sun, for therein is life! This is the living gold which cometh down from heaven to give light to all. And lo, wherever it falleth upon earth, it worketh good; it lifteth up, and giveth strength, and maketh rich! Lo, upon thy face, also, brother, lieth this gift, making thee comely to look upon! And since Brother Sun hath made thee fair of face, shall not thy soul also shine fair to the eyes of God?

JUNIPER. I'm going to see visions, Father! I'm not myself!

2ND ROBBER. And you'll not hang us, Father?

JUNIPER. Hang you? What for should he be hanging the like of you, wasting good rope?

ROBBERS. Oh, we be sinners, Father, we be sinners! We are very much afraid.

FRANCIS. Do not be. Here is Sister Gold. (*He puts the bag of gold into* 1ST ROBBER'S *hands*)

1ST ROBBER. But what shall we do with it, Father?—Nay, take it back, Father. For truly this is not ours.

FRANCIS. I doubt not, if ye give Sister Gold Christian burial, that she will pray for you.

2ND ROBBER. We bury her, Father?

FRANCIS. Aye, see! Here is good ground where she may rest in peace.

1ST ROBBER. You mean—put her away, Father?

FRANCIS. Give her back to God, brother.

3RD ROBBER. I think we be all fools, Father. But if you say so, it must be right.

FRANCIS. If our folly makes us wise, brother! Which of you, now, will dig her grave?

1ST ROBBER. I'll do it, Father.

2ND ROBBER. And I.

3RD ROBBER. Keep off! You leave it to me!
(*He starts digging*)

2ND ROBBER. Don't you want help, brother?

3RD ROBBER. You can look on!

(1ST and 2ND ROBBER *help to shovel out the earth with their hands.*)

FRANCIS. And to do this thing, not one of you is afraid??

1ST ROBBER. No, Father! What for should we be afraid?

FRANCIS. When ye first went seeking it, ye kept watch, fearing every man!

2ND ROBBER. Aye, that is true, Father.

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, I'm having visions, Father! I can see our Lord riding into holy Jerusalem sitting on a milk-white ass, and three big blind donkeys following Him, and me at the tail end of 'em; and never the stroke of a stick wanted to tell 'em where they are to go! Oh, it's a fair vision I'm having, Father, and I see it all!

FRANCIS. Have your vision, Brother. Yet shall you see it better, if you talk less of it.

3RD ROBBER. Will that do, Father?

FRANCIS. Yea, truly! See how willing was Sister Earth to make room in her breast! Come, brothers, there is Sister Gold. She is in your hands, brothers. (*The ROBBERS with contrite humility lay the bag of gold in the ground*) Now doth she enter into rest. Now is she at peace. Now is her face set toward the City of God. Doubt not, though ye give

this poor mortal body to ground that ye shall see it hereafter arise in glory. (*The ROBBERS rise from their task*) So now, Brothers, thank God that He hath made you rich.

1ST ROBBER. This be a great wonder, Father!

JUNIPER. Aye, so! And all the Brothers up there waiting breakfast, and wondering what has become of it. Shall I go, Father?

FRANCIS. Tarry awhile, Brother, for here comes more Hunger.

(*Enter old MISER, very feeble and tottering, with bandaged head.*)

MISER. Oh, Father Friar, help, help! Save me, father!

FRANCIS. Art thou in fear, brother?

MISER. Aye!—Yes, I—I be mortally afraid.

FRANCIS. Wherefore? Art thou in sin?

MISER. In sin? Nay, most foully have I been sinned against. Oh, the things that I have suffered this night!—My gold, my gold, all my gold is gone!

FRANCIS. And thy wits also, brother!

MISER. 'Twere no great wonder; my skull being so drained of blood!—Ten thieves set upon me, Father; they beat me till I was black and blue. They knocked out my senses. Then they took all my gold. Oh, my gold!

FRANCIS. But they left thee thy life, Brother.

MISER. What use is life, Father, when one has lost all!

FRANCIS. Friend, I am sorry for thee. (*To the ROBBERS*) We are all sorry, are we not?

1ST ROBBER. We are, indeed, Father!

2ND ROBBER. Sorry isn't the word, Father.

3RD ROBBER. My heart bleeds for him!

(*With these compunctious but face-saving remarks,*

the ROBBERS do their best to meet an awkward situation.)

JUNIPER. Ah, you're a sad sight! And here's a bit of bread for you. (*The old man takes it mechanically, but his attention is elsewhere.* JUNIPER approaches the embarrassed ROBBERS) And here's more bread for you three donkeys, for ye look hungry again!—(*Aside*) You'd better be off!

(But the ROBBERS, awkward squad though they be, are ready to face fire; and will take their marching orders only when ST. FRANCIS gives the word.)

MISER. Who be these?

(The ROBBERS break bread and pause, each with a mouthful in hand.)

FRANCIS. Grave-diggers.

MISER. Why, then, they should be honest men.

FRANCIS. Do they not look honest?

(The ROBBERS precipitately fill their mouths with bread, the munching of which helps them to look innocent.)

MISER. I say nothing against it, Father, they being with you. But oh, the thieves, the thick thieves there be in the world! And all my gold gone!

JUNIPER. Ten thieves, did you say?

MISER. Aye; they had the weight of ten when they all fell on me. But there in the dark, less or more, how could one tell?

FRANCIS. Would you know them again, Brother?

(The ROBBERS again pause with mouthfuls of bread in their hands.)

MISER. (*Vengefully*) Aye! God helping me, I would! I bit the finger of one: him I would know! (2ND ROBBER *puts his hand behind his back*) One I heard speak; his voice I should know! (*The ROBBERS again fill their mouths with bread*) And one I should know by his smell!

(*The ROBBERS, with their chances of escape thus diminished, turn supplicating eyes to St. FRANCIS.*)

FRANCIS. Your head is bleeding, Brother.

MISER. Aye, very like! Though I have not much blood left.

FRANCIS. (*To 3RD ROBBER*) Bind up his wound, brother—Be careful how you handle it!

(*The 3RD ROBBER goes braced to his task. For lack of a bandage he pulls up the tail of his shirt and tears it off.*)

MISER. Ah, if I could but catch the man that did this! Oh, God, that I might find him! (*He begins nervously to break and crumble the bread he has in his hand*)

FRANCIS. You wish to pardon him, Brother?

MISER. I pardon him?—I would put out his eyes! I would flay the flesh off his bones! I would hang him up by the heels till his head did rot off—Ah! (*For at that moment the bandaging causes him pain*)

3RD ROBBER. (*Meekly*) Your pardon, Brother.

FRANCIS. Would you do so to all ten?

MISER. Aye, every mother's son of 'em!

FRANCIS. Peradventure there were found, friend, three of the ten that had repented. Wouldst thou not have mercy upon three?

MISER. Why should I have mercy on them that took all my gold? Why should I—

(*The 3RD ROBBER being short of bandage-material, and failing to make it enough, is looking about for more. The other two ROBBERS pull up the tails of their shirts and offer what is requisite.*)

2ND ROBBER. Have a bit of bread, master, you'll feel better after it? (*Offers it*)

MISER. (*Feebly*) Shall I?—I don't know. I—Oh, how shall I live, having lost all my gold!

1ST ROBBER. Bread is worth more than gold, Master.

MISER. What does that gabbling fool say?

FRANCIS. He speaks as he knows, Brother.

1ST ROBBER. Aye, look you! for last night, gaffer, I had as much gold under my hand as ever you had. But I gave it all up—for a bit of bread.

MISER. The more fool you!

FRANCIS. It was living bread, brother. And having, that he shall not hunger again. Go in Peace, brothers: for now is our Sister at rest, since you have given her good burial.

ROBBERS. God bless you, Father!

FRANCIS. Brothers, God bless and keep you.

3RD ROBBER. (*To JUNIPER*) God keep you, Master, from those ten robbers.

(*Exeunt the three ROBBERS.*)

JUNIPER. Oh, Father, they be three great donkeys. But our Lord hath put his mark upon their backs!

MISER. Burial, you say? Who have they been burying, Father?

FRANCIS. One that was dead, men having so mishandled her. And her name was Sister Gold.

MISER. Gold? Gold?

FRANCIS. Even so, Brother.

MISER. Whose gold?

FRANCIS. God's, Brother. To whom else can gold belong?

MISER. Where found they that gold, Father? Where found they that gold?

FRANCIS. In a field, Brother. There was an old man burying it, because he had no use for it, knowing that it was dead. Then came others who knew it not; so, thinking that she was alive, they took her from him that buried her, and brought her hither. But seeing her in the light of day they found that she was dead.

MISER. What have they done with that gold, Father?

FRANCIS. They have given her back to God, Brother.

MISER. Ah! you mean that the Church has taken it! She had no right to it. That gold was mine! Oh, you friars and priests, you are all thieves like the rest of them! Give it back, give it back to me, I say!

FRANCIS. I have not taken your gold, Brother.

MISER. Where is it, then?

FRANCIS. She is in peace, lying at rest in Mother Earth. Seek not to disturb her again, Brother. Did not you yourself put her there?

(The OLD MISER is up against a hard problem. ST.

FRANCIS knows where the gold is, and may not choose to divulge its whereabouts. It comes then, to this: How is he to get such standing with the Friar, that the knowledge may become his? With mind busily catching at straws, he starts muttering to himself:)

MISER. My gold!—Yes, yes, my gold—Yes, I did put it there; I—Yes, yes. I—Father—you say that it is safe—that gold, father?

FRANCIS. It is safe, Brother.

MISER. Where does it lie, Father?

FRANCIS. In God's hands, Brother.

MISER. Yes—but I—(*He glances round suspiciously*)

FRANCIS. Art thou still afraid, Brother?

MISER. Of what, Father?

FRANCIS. Of robbers.

MISER. Why should I fear robbers, now that they have taken all my gold?

FRANCIS. Very true. Therefore thou art at peace.

MISER. I?

FRANCIS. And she that was thy sorrow, is at peace also.

MISER. She?

FRANCIS. The robbers had pity on Sister Gold—and wilt thou be less kind to her than they? Didst thou not love Sister Gold.

MISER. Yes, Father, yes! Show me where she lies now?

FRANCIS. She was cold, and naked, and in bondage, and the lust of men's eyes had shamed her. So in the fear and love of God they buried her. And now she is at peace.

MISER. Father, you must be a marvellous holy man to talk like that! At peace, you say? Well, I,—God forbid that I should seek to take away her peace!—Let her rest, let her rest, as you say, Father!—Yet I would like to know, Father, where you have buried her, so that I may come now and then and say a prayer upon her grave—You wouldn't tell me, I suppose—you wouldn't tell me just where she—

FRANCIS. She lies here, Brother; under this tree.

JUNIPER. Ah! now you've done it, Father.

MISER. Here!

FRANCIS. Even so, Brother.

MISER. What? All here? Oh, God! can it be true? Yes! for the ground's been dug. I—Well, well, Father, God give her peace!—And you, too,

Father, and you, Brother. Yes, let ner lie. Will you give your blessing, Father, to a poor man?

FRANCIS. The Lord bless you and keep you, Brother. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, Brother. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

JUNIPER. Are you going to say "Amen?"

MISER. Aye!—Amen—(*Pauses for a moment, then goes*)

JUNIPER. Father, did you believe that old man when he so readily foreswore his gold?

FRANCIS. No, Brother; but he believes me.

JUNIPER. That his gold is buried here? Why, so I think! And as soon as your back is turned, Father—

FRANCIS. Yes, Brother. Hark, there is that bird again! Is it not wonderful, Brother, how men love fear; and rather than be without it, they will die? (*St. FRANCIS goes and stands under the tree*) Oh, thou little brother, that brimmet with full heart, and having naught, possessest all, surely thou dost well to sing! For thou hast life without labour, and beauty without burden, and riches without care. When thou wakest, lo, it is dawn; and when thou comest to sleep, it is eve. And when thy two wings lie folded about thy heart, lo, there is rest. Therefore sing, brother, having this great wealth, that when thou singest thou givest thy riches to all. Come, let us go, Brother Juniper. You lead the way. (*JUNIPER shoulders his basket and mounts the path leading to the monastery*) Farewell, little brother! Have no fear! (*To the bird. St. FRANCIS makes the sign of the cross to the bird, and passes behind the tree and into the wood*)

(*Re-enter the OLD MISER; he is carrying a stake; he starts and trembles, looking from right to left. HE comes to the spot where the gold lies buried.*)

MISER. Father Fool, Father Fool, did you think to keep my gold from me? (HE starts digging) No, you don't—no, no, you don't! You don't! You don't! Ah, my gold, my beautiful gold, come to me! Where art thou?—(HE reaches into the hole and draws out the bag of gold. ST. FRANCIS re-appears through the trees, and stands behind him) Ah, there thou art! My sweet, my sweet! Welcome back to me again! (HE hugs the gold to his breast)

FRANCIS. Welcome, Sister Fear!

MISER. Ah! (Hiding the bag of gold under his coat, he starts back in an extremity of terror, and crouches trembling, expecting death. ST. FRANCIS stands perfectly still behind him. Slowly he turns and looks) Father!—Father—I didn't mean—to do it, Father—(ST. FRANCIS stands, not regarding him, saying nothing. Presently the OLD MAN puts the bag back into the hole, and begins to shovel in the earth with his hands. His breast is shaken with dry sobs. He works slowly at first, then with more and more feverish haste till the task is done) Father, give me your blessing, for I have sinned!

FRANCIS. The Lord bless you and keep you, Brother, The Lord make his face to shine upon you, Brother, The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace. (ST. FRANCIS makes the sign of the Cross, then turns and goes up the hill)

(The OLD MAN totters to his feet, and the sun shines on his face. The look of fear goes out of his eyes. From the Monastery comes the sound of the second Angelus. The OLD MAN crosses himself three times, kneels down and prays. You hear the first words "Ave, Maria;" after that you only see the quick muttering of his lips. At "Sancta Maria" he becomes audible again, but the rest is silence. When his lips cease to move, the CURTAIN falls.)

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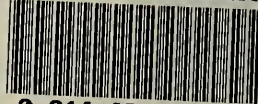
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